

British History Is Blighted By Cancer Of Violence

LONDON—English monarchs, hidden smugly in the royal palace, lived under constant fear of assassination—especially Queen Victoria whose life was threatened in seven different occasions.

In 1849, a young man fired twice into the royal coach carrying Queen Victoria through Buckingham Palace and missed both times. A shocked England still remembered well the murder of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval in the House of Commons not many years before.

Now, more than a century later, England looks on with horror and just a not of condescension at an America seemingly blighted with the cancer of violence.

ONE HUNDRED years have shaped another England, one which has forgotten the Tower of London, the blood-soaked history on the Tudor kings, and even the giant man outside the gates of Buckingham Palace.

It is an England whose police have never been armed, in which the prime minister and members of his government mingle almost freely with crowds, drive to engagements in ordinary automobiles.

They are guarded by police, of course. But a British police guard in no way compares with the small army of Secret Service men surrounding U.S. leaders on public appearances.

"You must understand," said one Scotland Yard representative when asked about the differences between the two nations. "We have a different heritage, a different class history here."

"One might even say, and not entirely facetiously, that our history has had its jolly good fill of violence and murder."

NOT ENTIRELY facetiously. Consider the merest glance through the history books:

—Edward IV had Henry VI tortured, then slain with an incandescent poker in the Tower of London following the battle of Tewkesbury, May 3, 1471.

—Richard II was said to have had his two nephews, rightful heirs to his throne, killed in the tower in 1483. He has also been mentioned as probable murderer of his wife, Anne Neville.

—Henry VIII was responsible for the deaths, among others, of several of his father's ministers, the cleric-philosopher Sir Thomas More, and his third wife, Anne Boleyn.

Today's Britain, existing in another world, may yet be forced to adapt gradually to the pace of its own violent times.

On Aug. 12, 1966, gunmen killed three unarmed British detectives outside the walls of London's Wormwood Scrubs Prison. The resultant outcry rocked a 137-year-old British tradition.

"Is it time to give the policeman a gun?" newspaper headlines asked. "Must our police be left defenseless?"

Police authorities refused. Armed police, they said, would mean more heavily armed criminals, snowballing into a precedent for violence almost.

AMERICAN. The word was on many lips. But the tradition began in 1829 with the founding of the London Metropolitan Police. Police prevailed. Police have remained unarmed, on the apparent assumption that lawbreakers are still less inclined to carry weapons than they would be if every "Bobby" sported a revolver.

British gun laws, another matter of tradition, are strict.

used at athletic events.

Until 1968, both could be obtained through mail order houses. This is no longer the case. Firearms are still available through underworld sources—they always will be. But the process is difficult enough to put off all but the

most determined seeker.

"One thing we've got to face," said the Scotland Yard spokesman. "If a man wants a gun badly enough he will get it. The purpose of our laws is to make his getting it as inconvenient as possible."

PUBLIC FIGURES, be they

government or royalty, must always reckon to some extent with the "lunatic fringe"—even here.

In the late 1950's an escapee dragged an eight-foot steel girder across railroad tracks shortly to be traveled by a train

bearing the Queen. Security forces discovered it—and him—in time.

Detectives at a royal garden party caught a would-be assassin moments before his planned attack on the Queen Mother.

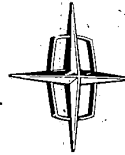
"Fanatics and crackpots exist in any society," the police officer said. "It is our job to control and keep track of them."

In the meantime, Prime Minister Harold Wilson, bombarded with eggs and rotten tomatoes and heckled to exasperation by students disenchanted with his Labor government, continued to

accept speaking engagements at universities.

Will some disgruntled British factory laborer, perhaps taking his cue from the grim happenings in America, one day change all that and plunge his nation into terror with a single shot?

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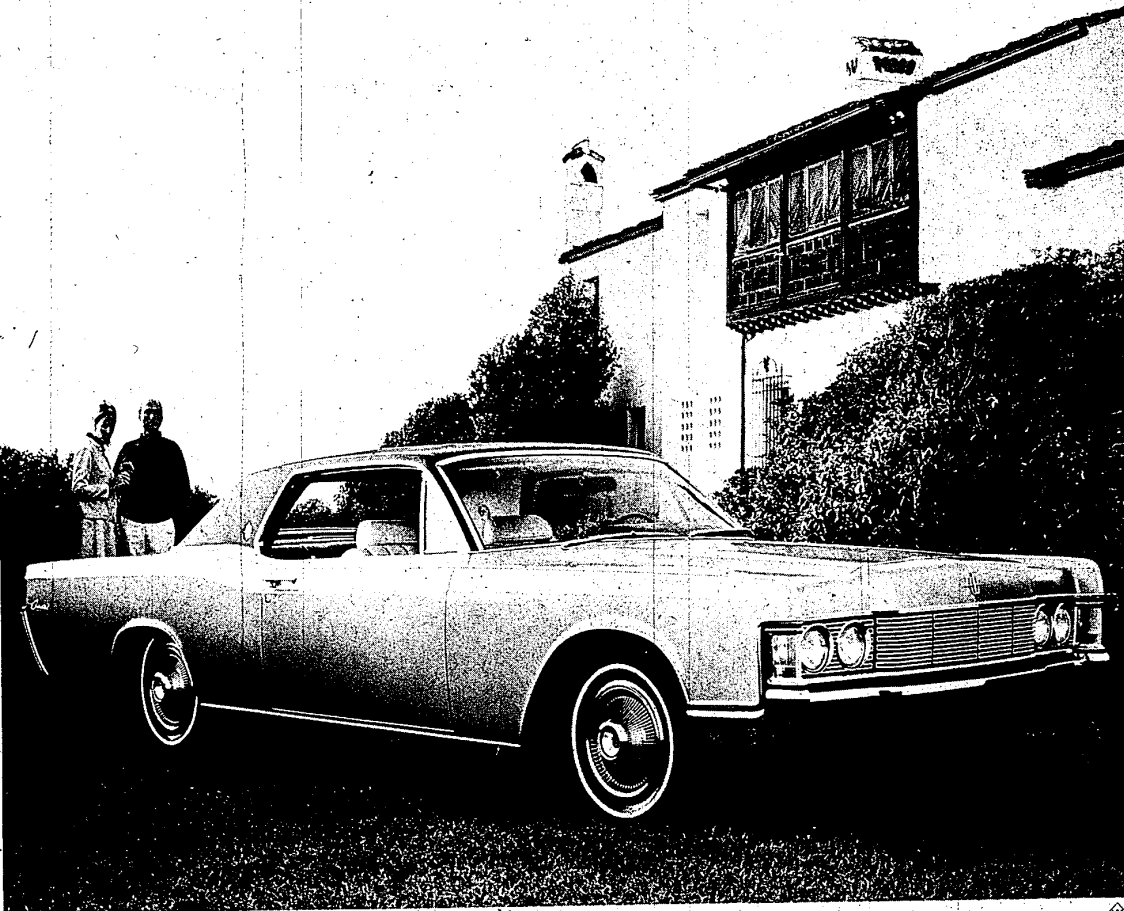
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